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THE DARK TOWER ~ THE GUNSLINGER ~



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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain is the last gunslinger of the line of Arthur Eld. His quest is the pursuit of the elusive Man in Black and he will not stop until he brings him to the Dark Tower.

His travels have taken him to many strange places, most recently Tull, a town whose residents Roland was forced to kill to stay alive as they attacked him en masse.

As he crosses the endless Mohaine desert, the gunslinger believes he has sighted the Man in Black. But that may only have been an illusion, as the exhausted Roland collapses not at the feet of his quarry but at those of a boy brandishing a pitchfork.

The boy is John, or Jake Chambers, who tells Roland that a priest did pass through a short time ago. Upon questioning, Jake reveals that he doesn't know how he came to be in Mid-World. He tells Roland that on another Earth he was pushed in front of a car and killed by someone who may have been the Man in Black. Jake then found himself in Mid-World.

Roland and Jake prepare to set out again, first checking the cellar for supplies. A voice from the wall tells Roland, "While you travel with the boy, the Man in Black travels with the soul in his pocket." He pulls a jawbone from the wall and keeps it, leaving with Jake for the mountains.

After they make camp and fall asleep, Roland awakens from a fevered nightmare to see Jake is gone.

He locates the boy standing before the spirit of the Oracle--a succubus. Roland attempts to dispel the demon by thrusting the jawbone at her face, admonishing her to begone...

Again and again, Roland shouts, "Begone." Problem is, it don't so much work as it, y'know... don't work.

Keep away, damnable succubus. The boy is not for such as thee!

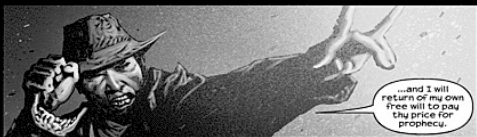
Better me than thee, gunslinger. Better the quick mercy of my embrace than the slow death that awaits him at thy side.

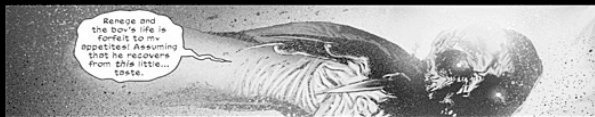
Much do I know of both your futures, and none of it pleasurable. Turn from its path and embrace me instead.

Is not a moment of joy preferable to days of pain and regret?

If you truly have knowledge of the future, then let us go now...









Jake!
Jake!

Jake, see
this. See it
very well.

This has
strong mojo
within. Focus on
it. It wards off
the evil eye. Do
you kennit?



yeah...kennit...
whatever...



Sleep
now.

Good
plan...



He's amazingly
light.

Dehydrated
as a November
leaf he is, from our
long walk through
the desert.

I'll be back,
demon...but only
when the boy
is safe.

*And a whispery voice
seems to say, "He will
never be safe with
thee. Never."*

The moonlight
on your face
reminds me of a
church saint,
alabaster purity
all unknown.

Susan Delgado
suffered a saint's
death...burned
alive...

...with my child
in her belly. So
two died that day.
Well, three if you
count the person
that I once was.

I look at you,
Jake, and see the
road I never traveled...
the son I never had, but
would have valued
above all things.

And some
of the Roland-
long-dead stirs
in thanks.

There

That should
be sufficient to
keep you here, should
the succubus attempt
to lure you away in
your slumber.

Good
night...

...son.



Jake, calling him: that is how the gunslinger awakens. By the sun it's almost nine-thirty.

Why'd you tie me up? I wasn't going to run away. Or is this some kind of gunslinger kinky thing that I'm probably not *old* enough to know about?



You *did* run away. I had to go out and get you. You were sleepwalking.

I was? I never did anything like that be--

We don't have time to palaver.



Do you see this?

Eeeechhhh. Get that...that disgusting thing away--

This disgusting thing saved your life. There's strong magic in it.



Take the bone and keep it close.



Sooo first I'm tied up, and now I'm holding your magic bone.

This morning just could *not* be more disturbing.



The gunslinger walks deliberately toward the circle of stone. As he does so, he feels the drug starting to take effect.

The drug has disturbed him in the past. His ego is too strong to enjoy being eclipsed and peeled back.



But this time he's filled with calm. So that's good.

The world...

I had forgotten what it could look like.

Tickling at me like the touch of a cat's whiskers.

When it's not screaming at me.

My teeth feel strange in my head. Tiny tombstones set in pink, moist earth.

Who knew there was too much light in the world?

Beyond the reach of human range...a drop of hell...a touch of strange...

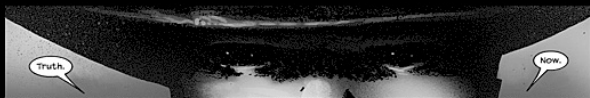
I come...
I come...



A sigh. A faint sound of weeping. Over and above him and beyond the faces in the leaves, he can see the mountains--hard and brutal and full of teeth.









See worlds
rise and fall
before you. Empires
built across shining
sands, which then
choke the stainless
steel gutters.

And through
it all, a diving wind of
change blowing through
with the cinnamon smell
of late October. There are
other worlds, gunslinger.
Watch for the doorways.
Watch for the roses
and the unfound
doorways.

Three. This
is the number of
your fate. Three
stands at the heart
of your quest. Another
number comes later;
now the number
is three.

Which
three?



The first is
young, dark-haired.
He stands on the
brink of robbery and
murder. A demon
named *HERON* has
infected him.



The second
comes on wheels.
I see no more.

And the
third...death.
But not for
you.





The man in black. Where is he?

Of what will we speak?

Near. You will speak with him soon.

The Tower.

And the boy? Jake? Tell me of the boy!

The boy is your gate to the man in black.



The man in black is your gate to the three.

The three are your way to the Dark Tower.

How can that be? Why must it be, Star-slug? Where of the winds?



Some live on love that comes to ancient places. Some live on blood. Even on the blood of young boys.

May he not be spared?



Yes, Geese, gunslinger. Strike your camp and turn back northwest. In the northwest there is still a need for men who live by the bullet.

I am sworn by my father's guns and by the treachery of Marten.



Marten is no more. The man in black has eaten his soul. This you know.

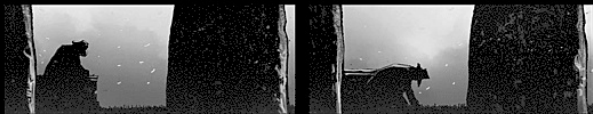
I am sworn.



Then you are damned.

As are we both. Have your way with me, bitch.

The shadow swings over him, enfolding him. Faces come to him unbidden...







Several days later they are climbing through a coldly damp snatch of cloud that blots out the tumbled slopes below them.

The bundle of their remaining food is so light that Jake carries it easy. He'd toughened up, the boy had; you could see it.

The trees have begun to lose their height and lushness. Trunks are twisted and roots seem to struggle with the earth in a tortured hunt for moisture.

It's all so old. Is there anything young in this world?

You are.

Roland, what's wrong? Why did you stop--?

That footprint. Is it him?

Yar.

Go. The day's getting old.

A week later, continuing southeast, they reach a point perhaps halfway through the mountain range, surrounded by icy ledges and screaming buttes.

And then, that afternoon...

I smell him.

so do I.

Does that mean I'm becoming more like you, that I can do that?

Perhaps.

Is that a good thing?

Maybe. Maybe not.

Roland, wait! Let's go back. Let's go back, quick. Please?

No.

You're going to kill me.

And I don't mean like, "Whoa, my dad's gonna kill me."

I mean the man in black killed me the first time and you're going to kill me this time.

And I think you know it.

You'll be all right.

Why do I think you're lying?

Because
he is, boy!
If you wish
truth...

Talk to me.
For I speak *only*
the truth. They are
simply truths that
he has no wish
to hear.

Gunslinger!
How well you fulfill
the prophecies and
replay the
treacheries
of old!

Good day
and good day and
good day!

Before he can gain control of his traitor hands, Roland fires three times.



The echoes bounce their bronze tones against the rock valley that rises around them, over the sound of the wind and water.

Would you kill *all* your answers so easily, gunslinger?



Come down. Do that, I beg ya, and we'll have answers all around.

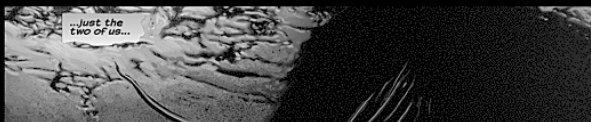
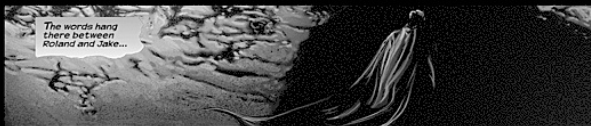
It's not your bullets I fear, Roland. It's your idea of answers that scares me.

Come down.



We'll speak on the other side, I think. On the other side we will hold much council and long palaver.







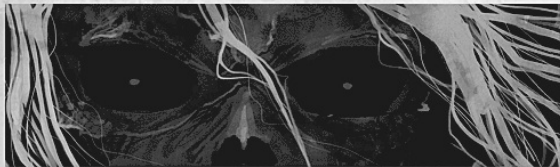
THE SUCCUBUS

A couple of months ago I met up with a friend of mine who—like me—is a great fan of the Dark Tower novels. As always we had a great conversation about Mid-World. During the course of our talk I finally asked him a question that had been nagging me for years. How could he like Dark Tower when he absolutely abhorred fantasy novels? My friend stared at me, his eyes wide with horror. "Dark Tower isn't fantasy," he replied. "It's *science fiction*!" I smiled but didn't argue. After all, he had a point. Mid-World contains enough defunct robots, Dogans, and ruined machinery to set it firmly within the realm of science fiction. However in my experience, great books are rarely so easily classified. Few science fiction novels consist solely of *hard* science; most contain literary flights-of-fancy. On the other hand, many fantasy novels play upon legends and folklore found in our world.



And if you go back far enough—say to the time of *Beowulf*—much of what we now call fantasy would have been called *historical fact*. So much for categories.

Discussing *types* of books, and whether one kind is better than another, always brings to mind a great conversation that takes place in *Wolves of the Calla*. Eddie Dean, who is from New York, is trying to explain literary categories to Roland. "In our world" Eddie says, "you got your mystery and suspense stories ... your science fiction stories ... your Westerns ... your fairy tales. Get it?" Roland is surprised. "Do people in your world always want only one story-flavor at a time?" he asks. "Does no one eat stew?" Although I'll never try to explain it to my science-fiction-loving friend,



one of the aspects of the Dark Tower universe I love the most is the fact that it is such a rich stew of genres. There's something for everybody in Mid-World, whether you love science-fiction, Westerns, fantasy, romance, horror, or straight drama. It even contains legends from our world, which is wonderful for a wannabe folklorist like me.

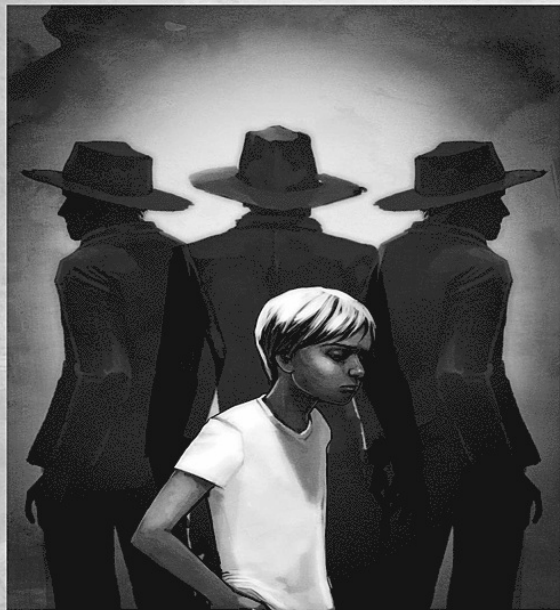
As my sci-fi friend acknowledges (albeit with a humorous roll of the eyes), I have always loved fantasy. I suppose it grows out of my love of folklore. In fact, one of the reasons I enjoyed writing this month's plot so much was because it contains a succubus. As we all know, succubi exist in the folklore of our world, too. According to Medieval Church doctrine, a succubus was a female demon that had sexual intercourse with sleeping men. (Evidently, medieval monks were often plagued by these demonic sirens.) The term *succubus* comes from the Latin word *succuba*, or "harlot," which in turn comes from the Latin verb *succubare*, which means "to lie under." In its masculine form, the succubus becomes an incubus. (This is from the Latin verb *incubare*, which means "to lie on.") Just as female *succubi* preyed upon sleeping men, the male incubi preyed upon

sleeping women. In some versions of the British Merlin legend, the sorcerer Merlin was fathered by an incubus. This is very interesting, considering the sinister role that Maerlyn's magical spheres play in the Dark Tower novels. (Maerlyn, of course, is Mid-World's version of Merlin.)

In both Mid-World and our world, succubi are female sex-demons that feed on men. However when you examine them closely, their differences are striking. The succubi in our world can travel anywhere. Unlike vampires, who need to be invited into a person's home, the legendary succubus of our world can slip into any bedroom and prey upon the person sleeping there. In Mid-World on the other hand, succubi exist within Stone Circles. As far as we know, they are trapped within these speaking rings and cannot leave.

In both our world and Mid-World, we can safely assume that succubi are shape-shifters. A single succubus haunting a single monastery probably took on myriad shapes. Similarly, the demon that confronts Roland in the speaking ring appears to him as





Susan Delgado. But this brings us to another important difference. In Mid-World, succubi can prey upon wakeful, if not fully awake, men. In order to interact with the demon of the speaking ring Roland must take a drug to make his mind more receptive. However he remains conscious during the entire episode, despite the fact that the demon *wishes* him to

sleep.

The final and most important difference between the succubus that Roland encounters and the succubi in our world is that Roland's succubus is an oracle. She can give prophecy, and it is because of this gift of divination that Roland willingly seeks her out. Unlike the succubi of our world, the succubi of

Mid-World have a magical purpose beyond the *glammer* they throw to feed their sensual hunger. In that particular trait, Roland's succubus resembles other types of medieval demons—the kinds that were called up by necromancers and magicians who drew magical circles to contain their hellish visitors. Like those medieval magicians, Roland must battle the succubus's innate sorcery with his own forms of magic. His cache of magical weapons consists of the jawbone he found in the Way Station (it is almost as if the power of one Mid-World demon can counteract the *glammer* of another), the sign of the eye which he forks at the demon, and his own intense gunslinger training. But Roland's trump is the *dinh* mark on his gun: sigil of Arthur Eld, and symbol of the *White*, that force of Good to which all gunslinger-knights pledge themselves.

When Roland finally allows himself to be lulled into a half-sleep by the succubus of the stone circle, the Oracle grants him visions of Empires, and of the winds of change which continually sweep across Mid-World. She then tells him of his own *ka*. "Three . . . is the number of your fate . . ." Finally Roland demands to know whether Jake will be spared; whether the boy—alone among all of Roland's traveling companions—will live to see the end of their shared journey. The oracle replies that Jake can be spared, but only if Roland recants his quest. This Roland is not willing to do, so the oracle tells him he is damned.

Is the succubus telling the truth? We do not know. As medieval necromancers recorded in their strange books of spells, demons are natural liars. Even when they tell truth, they are able to twist it for their own ends. So dear fellow Constant Readers, if you want to know the truth of the oracle's utterances and



the fate of our friend Jake, you must join us on our next journey.

See you in the pages of *The Man in Black*!

Long Days and Pleasant Nights,

Robin Furth

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEPHANIE HANS

ART EVOLUTION

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1. But Roland has drawn his gun. The dinh mark near the muzzle of the gun burns white in the hellish light of the stone circle. The succubus turns her head away and hisses. She cannot bear to look at the mark. "In me runs the blood of Eld," Roland cries, "and thee shall not be the first demon I have sent back to Na'ar!"

2. With an echoing cry, the succubus transforms into a black whirlwind. *Keep thy promise or I shall eat the boy!* It screams.

THUMBNAILS BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



INKS BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



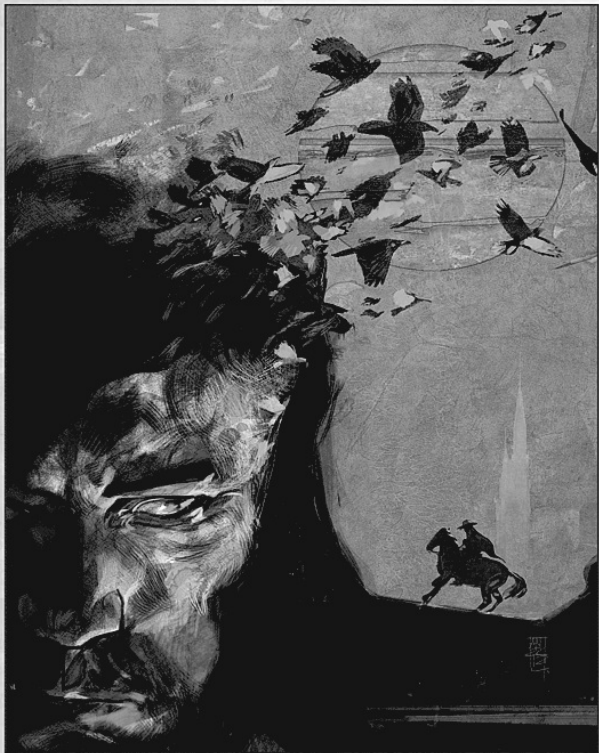
COLORS BY RICHARD ISANOVE



COVER INKS FOR THE WAY STATION #5 BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



NEXT: THE MAN IN BLACK





The Man in Black flees across the desert with the gunslinger Roland in close pursuit. But is it all an illusion? Barely escaping the sleepy little town of Tull with his life and leaving a pile of bodies behind him, Roland has arrived at the Way Station exhausted and dehydrated. It is there that he meets Jake Chambers, a boy from another Earth where cars roam streets and clothes are sold on mannequins. But how did Jake get there and what is his connection to the mysterious Man in Black? Roland and Jake set off together, continuing the ever treacherous journey towards the Dark Tower to find the Man in Black and make Mid-World right again.

From the superstar creative team of Robin Furth, Peter David, Richard Isanove, and Laurence Campbell comes a brand-new story in the saga of the last gunslinger. Superbly mixing fantasy, horror, revenge, and betrayal, a story like this could only come from the mind of master storyteller Stephen King.

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